

*Special Copy For Maj Gen John W O'Daniel*

# *The German Operation at Anzio*

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## PREFACE

The following study of German operations against the Allied beachhead at Anzio, from 22 January to 31 May 1944, is based on the available journals and records of the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies. It should be noted that the facts and opinions expressed in the text reflect the German point of view, all statements on Allied troop strength, are German estimates.

Records of the German Air Force were not available, therefore the details of air action against the beachhead has not been included.

The expressions, tanks, armored, (Panzer), light motorized infantry, (Jager), and armored infantry, (Panzer Grenadier), have been left in the German for purposes of clarification. German tactical symbols, for German units, have been used on all maps; a brief glossary of symbols will be found at the end of this publication.

The enclosed maps of the Anzio area are old editions, and do not include newly constructed habitations and roads. Grid coordinates in the text refer to Map of Italy, sheet 158 (Littoria), GSGS 4164 second edition, 1943, scale 1: 100,000.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ANZIO CAMPAIGN

Italy's capitulation on 9 September 1943, and the resulting surrender of the Italian Armed Forces gave rise to many problems for the German High Command. Chief among these was the question of how much territory the German High Command should strive to hold, i.e., at what point the Allied offensive would have to be halted. The surprise landings on the "toe" of Italy and at Salerno, coupled with rapid advances, led to the fall of the large airbases, such as Foggia. This left the High Command with the twofold task of securing the Po Basin with its great political, economic, and military significance, as well as the politically important region of Rome. A line of defense had to be established in the mountains of central Italy. How far to the south it could be established would depend upon the availability of troops. However, due to the number, condition, and distribution of German troops, at the time, an advantageous realization of this task was not possible.

In southern Italy, Marshal Kesselring, the Commander in Chief South, commanded eight divisions, mostly motorized or armored, which were fighting opposite seventeen Allied divisions. A portion of these German units had come from Africa and had not yet been brought back to full strength; the other part consisted of reactivated divisions from the eastern front. These forces had also been weakened during their retreat through southern Italy. Therefore, they could not be expected to establish a firm defense line, if the Allies should continue their concentrated offensive to the North.

Northern Italy was occupied by Army Group B under the command of Marshal Rommel. This Army Group comprised thirteen divisions, which had arrived in Italy shortly before or during the capitulation. These units were, for the most part, reorganized or reactivated divisions from the Eastern front. Due to the immobility of these units, and the lack of equipment, they were not suitable for combat duty in the south, as long as the front had not become stabilized.

The Commander in Chief South was directed to fight an initial delaying action with the forces available to him. Army Group B was left in northern Italy to secure the coast, and to devote itself to the fortification of the northern Apennines in case of a rapid loss of central Italy. In the beginning of October, the Commander in Chief South succeeded in establishing a thin line of resistance from Naples to Termoli. On 10 October 1943, the German High Command ordered the Commander in Chief South to continue these tactics up to the line, Gaeta to Ortona, and to make a stand in this advantageous mountain position (Bernhard or Gustav position). To bolster his forces, two infantry divisions of Army Group B were transferred to the Commander in Chief South. Simultaneously, he was charged with the task of securing the coast in the region of Rome. Army Group B was ordered to pacify its zone against partisan activities, especially the Istrian peninsula, and to set up strongpoints for coastal security. For these tasks, nine divisions were left at the disposal of Army Group B; two of its divisions having been transferred to the Commander in Chief South, and two to the Eastern Front. There were constant threats of an Allied invasion in central Italy, which would bring the front in southern Italy to a state of collapse. Therefore, Army Group B was ordered to consolidate an Apennine defensive line, south of Bologna, and to

make preparations for its occupation.

Until the end of November, the situation was further stabilized. On 21 November 1943, Marshal Kesselring acquired the title Commander in Chief Southwest, and took over command of the entire Italian theater. The Commander in Chief Southwest was responsible for all military action in Italy. The High Command of Army Group C, was activated to assume charge over all the Army units remaining in Italy, and constituted the staff for the Commander in Chief Southwest. It did not command the Navy and Air Force, but controlled units of the Air Force fighting on land, and was charged with administration in the zone of operations. Rommel and the High Command of Army Group B was shifted to France.

At the time of the appointment of the Commander in Chief Southwest, two armies were formed under Army Group C the Chief of Staff being Brigadier General Westphal. The distribution of these forces is shown in map number 1.

#### Tenth Army

Commander: General von Vietinghoff  
Chief of Staff: Colonel Wentzell, GSC  
Area: Central Italy  
Units: 14th Armored Corps  
76th Armored Corps  
Ten divisions

To the rear, the army boundary followed the line Pionbino to Porto Civitanova. The area of Terracina-Rome-Orbetello, was not part of this zone; it was administered by the XI Air Force Corps which was directly under the Army Group.

#### Fourteenth Army\*

Commander: General von Mackensen  
Chief of Staff: Colonel Hauser, GSC  
Area: Northern Italy  
Units: 87th Army Corps  
51st Mountain Corps  
Nine divisions (only two qualified for combat)  
Operational Zones:  
Adriatic Coastal Region under Lieutenant General Kubler  
Alpine Approaches under Lieutenant General Witthoft, who also commanded the sector, Ancona-Venice on the east coast

\* Its staff had been formed in part, from Rommel's Army Group B headquarters.

The following is a translation of a teletype understanding reached between the Armed Forces High Command (OKW) and Marshal Graziani, showing Germany's relationship with the new Italian Republican Government:

1. It is essential that Italy will continue to make extensive contributions in the continuation of the war. For that, it is necessary that:
  - a. the German occupied part of Italy shall not be treated as enemy territory, but as a friendly country;

- b. and, the authority and independence of the Italian (Republican) government shall be established and maintained.

- 2. In this spirit, the zone of operations shall be confined to an area of 35 miles, behind the front in central Italy, and to the frontier regions in the North where the lines of communication to France and Germany must be protected.

The remainder of the country will be administered by the Italian Government. Zones of operations at the coast have been designated, but only at the time of an enemy landing will the German Armed Forces take over the administration from the Italians.

A Plenipotentiary Representative for the German Armed Forces in Italy (General of the Infantry Toussaint) is appointed for the territory administered by the Italian government. He is directly subordinate to the German Armed Forces High Command. His main tasks are:

- a. to represent the interests of the German Armed Forces with the Italian government, and insure that their demands are carried through by the Italian government or its subordinate authorities;
  - b. and to lend support to the Italian government and its authorities, as far as necessary, in the execution of governmental measures and in their relations with the German troops.
- 3. The defense of the line Gaeta-Ortona has a decisive significance in the continuation of the common struggle. With the loss of Rome, Italy would cease to be a belligerent country on the side of the Axis. Consequently, all auxiliary forces of the country have to be mobilized to protect the deep flanks and long shorelines, in order to free the German forces as much as possible for employment at the front. Units of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force are to utilize Italian volunteers without restrictions.
  - 4. The reactivation of large Italian formations is to be carried out in Army Training Centers outside of Italy.

The outstanding consideration was the apparent small number of German troops in Italy, and the relative equality in strength between the Tenth and the Fourteenth Armies. Tactically, this was not to be expected, but there were several reasons for such distribution. Because of events in the East, and the necessity to prepare against an invasion in the West, the German High Command was in no position to substantially strengthen the forces in Italy. The uncertainty regarding new Allied landings, the political unrest, and the resistance movement in northern Italy, forced the High Command to leave a large number of available forces in northern Italy. Therefore, until the Allied invasion of Normandy, only two divisions were assigned to the Fourteenth Army. Its other components were made-up from divisions in rest or reactivated divisions, from training and replacement units, and numerous smaller formations, namely, fortress battalions, security battalions, etc. As soon as a division of the Fourteenth Army reached full combat strength, it was assigned to the Tenth Army and exchanged for a battle-weary division. This led to a constant exchange of units between the two armies, and enabled the Germans to continue the defense at the front with

relatively few divisions. On the other hand, this procedure put a heavy load on the communications system in Italy, which had been greatly incapacitated by Allied air attacks as well as slowing up the defense preparations along the coasts. Under these circumstances, the Fourteenth Army was forced to act as a reservoir of forces for the front. It also had to carry out its mission of fortifying the coast and pacifying the country with weak and untrained units.

Until the landing at Anzio, and even up to the time of the Normandy invasion, the preparations for the coastal defense of Italy had primary importance. By means of small and poorly equipped air reconnaissance units, and other intelligence sources, an estimate of the available Allied reserves and shipping could be made. Nevertheless, the German command was not informed as to the actual preparations and target areas for a landing. Landings were possible on a tactical scale in support of the existing Italian front, or on a strategical scale with the aim to cut-off the entire Army Group. Thus, the entire Italian coast was under constant threat. Five defense sectors, centered around Genoa, Livorno, Rome, Rimini-Ravenna, and Istria, were formed because various coastal sectors were suitable as possible landing points. These defense sectors were fortified and reinforced with the available forces. The shoreline between these sectors was guarded by small units and obstacles. In October, the Fourteenth Army began to consolidate, the Gothic Line, a land defense line across the Apennines between La Spezia and Pesaro, and the Voralpen Line, in the Alps from the Swiss frontier to Istria. In the case of a successful Allied landing, these lines would provide prepared defensive positions in the rear of the central Italian front.

The number of German troops in Italy was barely sufficient to hold the southern front, as well as to strengthen the rear areas. In the case of an enemy landing, reinforcements would have to be dispatched from adjacent theaters, and from Germany proper, in order to prevent a collapse of the Army Group. In preparation for this the German High Command, at the end of December 1943, issued orders to the Commander in Chief West (France and Lowlands), the Commander in Chief Southeast (Balkans), and the Commander of the Replacement Army, specifying the units that were to be transferred to Italy in the event of a landing. Thus, the prompt arrival of reinforcements was assured to the Commander in Chief Southwest. Until their arrival, the Commander in Chief Southwest was directed to throw his own forces into the struggle. The Army Group had made extensive preparations. Detailed orders, determined which troops the armies and the independent corps were to dispatch to the endangered defense sector, in the case of an Allied landing; in this regrouping, only the combat units and the essential service troops for these units were to be transferred. The rest would remain in situ and secure their sectors. For deceptive purposes, the various defense sectors used code designations. (See Map No. 2.) The Army Group assigned a timetable for alerting and redeploying specific units; it issued directives to alerted units, specifying the march and convoy routes, and the location of dumps for gasoline, munitions, and rations. It also assigned troops to road and bridge repair, and provided for communications during the march. Emergency units were formed by all rear area troops to combat possible airborne attacks.

Units were to be ready to march or load within eight to twelve hours after the alert had been received. With the alert the code name of the landing place was to be issued, so that each unit could

proceed according to the prescribed schedule and along the proper route.

Army Group C was fully aware of the inadequate shore fortifications, and of the paucity of occupation forces at the coast. The Army Group considered it unlikely that it would be able to repulse a major enemy landing, since reinforcements would not immediately be available. This was also realized by the German High Command, and constant efforts were made to strengthen endangered coastal sectors; additional coastal artillery was set up, obstacles were constructed, and specific areas were mined and inundated.

The extent to which the coast was defended relied on the military situation on the Tenth Army front. If an Allied offensive caused an emergency on the southern front, new units were dispatched from northern Italy. They were replaced by a battle-weary unit, and this tended to weaken the coastal defenses. Since this played a decisive role in the success of the Anzio landing, a review of the situation at the Tenth Army front in the months preceding the landing follows.

November and December 1943, were characterized by extremely bitter defensive action by the Tenth Army. By tenacious defense and by repeated local counterattacks the front was held, and the retreat to the prepared Gaeta-Ortona position was delayed. Thus, valuable time was gained to consolidate this line (Bernhard or Gustav position), and later proved extremely advantageous.

Allied tactics along the front were partly responsible for the success of the relatively weak Tenth Army. Since the attacks by the American Fifth Army alternated with the attacks by the British Eighth, the German Command was able to move divisions from the quiet sectors and commit them to the endangered sectors. Thus, a breakthrough was avoided. The Germans yielded territory to the British Eighth Army, so as to concentrate on the Fifth Army front. An American breakthrough would mean the loss of Rome, and a German withdrawal from central Italy. In these two months, serious emergencies developed whenever an offensive was started by one of the Allies, prior to the completion of the preceding attack by the other. German mobile operations achieved an initial success, so that at the end of 1943, the battle was still being waged in front of the line, Gaeta-Ortona. The motorized and armored divisions of the Tenth Army underwent terrific strain, since they were continually engaged in active sectors and had little time for rest and repair. During November and December, strong material and personnel reinforcements had to be injected to prevent disintegration of the Tenth Army. To keep the strength of the Army at its former level, it became necessary to increase the number of divisions. The serious situation in Russia did not permit a transfer of divisions to a secondary theater. Army Group C was forced to release some of its own troops for the front, and thereby weaken its forces in northern Italy.

The only three divisions of the Fourteenth Army fit for combat, the 44th Infantry Division, the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, and the 334th Infantry Division were transferred to the Tenth Army. To counteract this loss in the north, the battle-weary 65th Infantry Division was taken out of the front at Ortona, and assigned to northern Italy. In addition, the activation of the 278th Infantry Division, and the 16 SS Panzer Grenadier Division was ordered. The German High Command directed the Fourteenth Army to release the 371st Infantry Division for use in Russia, so that eight divisions were left with this Army. Since none of these divisions had full combat strength, the coastal defenses in

northern Italy were decidedly weakened.

The unfavorable results of continuous emergencies at the front were plainly revealed by the situation in the sector west of Rome. A landing in the rear of the Tenth Army in support of the offensive at the front, had always been considered a possibility. Therefore, the task of securing the coast near Rome had a special significance. The Fourteenth Army could not assume this additional assignment. A further weakening of northern Italy was not dared, inasmuch as the German High Command was uncertain about the intentions of the Allies, such as landings at Rome, Gulf of Genoa, and Istria. As a result, troops from the Tenth Army were used to secure the coastal sector near Rome. This area was commanded by the 1st Parachute Corps operating directly under the Army Group.

Existing documents, of the Army Group and of the Tenth Army, revealed the constant conflict between the demands of the Army for reinforcements at the front and the necessity of maintaining a strong occupation force along the coast in the Rome sector.

Since no division, fit for combat, could be spared from the front, only battle-weakened units were employed in the Rome sector. At the beginning of November, with the aggravation of the situation at the front, merely one division could be released at a time. After a short rest period near Rome, the division would be sent back to the front. The continual flow of units that ensued, caused defensive preparations along the coast to be neglected, at the time of the Anzio landings.

The offensive activities of the Allies slackened. At the beginning of the new year, the Tenth Army planned a regrouping, in order to rest exhausted divisions and to strengthen coastal defenses in its area. It was planned to retire the Panzer Division "Hermann Goring" (HG) and the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division from the Cassino front. The 29th Panzer Grenadier Division was to be assigned to the coastal sector at Rome, to replace the 31 Panzer Grenadier Division. The latter was to be transferred to the Adriatic sector on the left flank of the Tenth Army, where the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division was to be relieved for employment in the coastal sector, Pescara-Ancona, and the 26th Panzer Division as a reserve behind the front. The requirements of this scheme could not be met because new attacks by the Allies at Cassino and on the Adriatic coast tied-up the German forces so that only the Panzer Division "Hermann Goring" and the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division could be removed from their respective sectors. Consequently, a large part of the 31 Panzer Grenadier Division remained in the region of Rome, pending relief by the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division.

At the beginning of January, a new tenseness arose, when various signs pointed to an impending Allied landing. Air and ground reconnaissance revealed troops and ships assembling in the region of Naples. Another indication was the fact that the offensive actions of the Allies against the Tenth Army changed to strong holding attacks. Since intelligence as to the date and place of an Allied landing was lacking, preparations for the defense of all the threatened coastal sectors, were speeded up. Consequently, the Army Group modified its plan for regrouping, but ordered the transfer of the 90th Panzer Grenadier Division from the east coast to the region of Rome. The transfer of this division was delayed by continued British Eighth Army attacks west of Ortona and by transportation difficulties in the mountains due to the weather. By 15 January, only half the division had arrived in the vicinity of Rome. Numerous difficulties were encountered in relieving the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division from

Cassino. The distribution of the German forces in Italy on 15 January 1943 is shown on Map No. 3.

At this critical stage, the preparations of the American Fifth Army for the offensive at the Garigliano River became manifest. Since 13 January, the Allies had been observed regrouping troops south of Cassino. At first, the intentions of these moves were not apparent. However, during the following days, up until 17 January, Allied air attacks at the Garigliano sector increased, and the registration fire of newly emplaced batteries was observed. The German command was now convinced that a major Allied attack at the Garigliano was imminent.

According to reconnaissance reports at Army Group the Allies had enough forces at their disposal to simultaneously launch a landing and a new offensive. This assumption, coupled with the observation of increased naval activity in the region of Naples, excluded the advisability of removing reserves from the region of Rome, in order to oppose the coming offensive at the Garigliano. Therefore, the Army Group resolved to hold all sectors of the front not immediately threatened, especially the Adriatic sector, and hastily to transfer the 31 Panzer Grenadier Division to the south. The bulk of the Panzer Division "Hermann Goering" was still available as a reserve, and thus a weakening of the Rome sector could be avoided. Originally the German High Command had ordered the latter division to be transferred to France on 20 January. As its replacement, the 71st Division was on the way from Istria. This would further strengthen the southern flank of the Tenth Army, which until the arrival of all these units considered itself able to bridge the crisis by committing all available local reserves.

On 18 January 1944, the expected offensive of the American Fifth Army against the Garigliano started. The attacker gained initial successes by a surprise landing of strong forces west of the mouth of this river. In heavy fighting on February 18 and 19, the Allies crossed the lower Garigliano on a wide front. It appeared that the German front in the south would collapse. The bulk of the Panzer Division "Hermann Goering" and all local reserves had already been committed in action, and the arrival of the 31 Panzer Grenadier Division and 71st Infantry Division could not be expected before 22 January. New measures had to be taken in order to prevent an Allied breakthrough.

In spite of the threat of an Allied invasion in central or northern Italy, the Army Group now decided to evacuate the coast west of Rome except for small security units. Thus, two divisions, the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions, were designated to conduct a counterattack at the Garigliano under the command of the 1st Parachute Corps. The Army Group foresaw a quick success in this action. This would release at the earliest possible moment the forces required to secure the coast near Rome. It was also estimated that a successful counterattack at the Garigliano might interrupt preparations and delay a possible Allied landing. However, an Allied breakthrough south of Cassino was regarded as dangerous as a successful landing near Rome. The issue was to settle the immediate crisis first. For this purpose, the German High Command gave the go-ahead signal to launch the counterattack, thereby committing reserves of the Rome area.

In execution of this order, a redeployment of troops began on the evening of 19 January. Forty-eight hours later, on the eve of the landings at Anzio, the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions, under the command of the 1st Parachute Corps, were in position for

a counterattack at the Garigliano. At this time, there were only small contingents of the 29th and 90th Panzer Grenadier Divisions left to secure the coast west of Rome, a sector nearly 100 miles long, stretching from Terracina through Anzio to Civitavecchia. A little further to the rear laid the newly activated 4th Parachute Division, which had not been brought up to strength, and a few tank and antitank companies. All these units were under the direct control of the Army Group after the 1st Parachute Corps had been placed under the command of the Tenth Army.

The coastal sector west of Rome was greatly weakened and was believed unable to effectively resist an amphibious operation. According to estimates, an Allied landing in this sector would bring the southern front to a state of collapse, since there were no reserves available to oppose such an operation. However, since the start of the Allied offensive at the Garigliano, no further intelligence about preparations for a landing had been obtained, and the German Command believed that the crisis had been averted.